

institutions, or even in the State. The Church was almost invariably the medium of public benefaction, as well as the recipient of gifts and endowments for religious purposes. While she thus continued to draw in wealth, she never gave it out again. Her authorities had forbidden ecclesiastical persons to alienate Church property.¹ Even when the Templars had forfeited their possessions, this principle had been strictly adhered to, and other religious bodies alone had gained by the spoliation.² If the process of endowment went on much longer at the same pace in a country so impoverished as England, the power of the priesthood might become a serious danger to the community. So at least thought some men at this period, especially those under Wycliffe's influence. One of them expresses his fears of the clergy who openly declare 'that they should get out of the secular hands all the temporal lordship that they may, and in no case deliver none again. And therefore a gentleman asked a great Bishop of this land, "In case the clergy had all the temporal possessions, as they have now the more part, how shall the secular lords and knights live, and wherewith?" And then he answered and said that "they should be clerks' soldiers and live by their wages." And certes this law of getting in of these temporalities and these other words of this Bishop ought to be taken heed to, for since they have now the more part of the temporal lordships and with that the spiritualities and" the great movable treasures of the realm, they may lightly make a conquest.'³ Such language is exaggerated, but it is not merely the wild talk of a partisan. The poet Gower, much as he disliked the Lollards, was gravely alarmed at the voraciousness of the Church and the inalienable character of the wealth that she daily acquired.⁴ "When, seventy years before, the French King had violated the person of Boniface the Eighth, and set up his successor in Avignon, the imminent danger with which the Papacy had threatened the Crowns of Europe had come to an end. The temporal power of Rome had been struck down. But no such blow had been dealt to the temporal power of the clergy as a

¹ Gibson, ii. 685 *et seq.* - *Stats, of Realm*, 17 Ed. II., stat. iu

* Matt., 368-9. - * Gower, *Vox Clam.*, bk. iii., cap. 11, line 993 *et seq.**